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ABSTRACT

Surveys have repeatedly shown that vast numbers of young people are interested in and concerned about environmental issues. Good youth work is concerned with the interests of young people, so the idea of environmental youth work--taking a youth work approach to environmental education--is a logical development for both environmental and youth work organizations. The Council for Environmental Education (CEE) Youth Unit encourages this approach to environmental work with young people. CEE completed a three-year National Environmental Youth Work Training Program which concentrated on three areas: (1) clarifying what "environmental youth work" means; (2) finding ways of supporting workers and managers in developing good practice; and (3) exploring how training can support the development of the work. These areas form the focus of this briefing. Strategies for youth workers include three basic approaches to environmental education, each with different emphases: (1) political education (focusing on power and decision making); (2) using the outdoors (environmental perspectives on outdoor activity); and (3) personal and social development (exploring issues and action). This briefing also contains sections on building alliances and achieving proposals of Agenda 21 on the local level. (PVD)

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The Story So Far...

A Brief History of Environmental Youth Work

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THE STORY SO FAR...

a brief history of environmental youth work

Surveys have repeatedly shown that vast numbers of young people are interested in and concerned about environmental issues. Good youth work is concerned with the interests of young people, so the idea of 'environmental youth work' – taking a youth work approach to environmental education – is a logical development for both environmental and youth work organisations.

CEE's Youth Unit aims to encourage this approach to environmental work with young people. In practice this means starting from the lives and interests of young people, and putting as much emphasis on the way work is done – the process – as on the outcome of it. Youth work priorities, such as young people's participation in decision making, empowerment and equality of opportunity, are key features of good practice in environmental youth work.

A major landmark in CEE's work in this field was the publication in 1990 of *EARTHworks*, a pack of practical activities, training and policy ideas, the result of a youth work project carried out in Birmingham and Staffordshire between 1987 and 1990 (the Youth and Environment Project). This was followed up by the publication of a revised *EARTHworks* Action Pack in 1992.

The project demonstrated various ways of carrying out environmental youth work, as well as highlighting the benefit to organisations of developing a clear policy statement about the purpose and value of work on environmental issues. At a national level, CEE was involved in ensuring that the deliberations of the Ministerial Conferences on youth work acknowledged the importance of informal environmental education policy.

CEE has recently completed a three year National Environmental Youth Work Training Programme, which concentrated on three areas:

- clarifying what 'environmental youth work' means;
- finding ways of supporting workers and managers in developing good practice;
- exploring how training can support the development of the work.

These form the focus of this Briefing.

BACKGROUND

CEE is.... a national umbrella organisation for environmental education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. CEE encourages and promotes an environmental approach to education through the creation of partnerships.

The Youth Unit is.... a team within CEE with the specific brief of encouraging the development of environmental education with young people in non-formal settings – outside of school or college. In practice, this means working with local authorities and voluntary organisations. One of the main aims of the Unit is to build working partnerships between environmental organisations and youth work agencies, statutory and voluntary.

This Briefing is.... a review of the past and current work of the CEE Youth Unit. It also looks forward to the main challenges facing informal environmental education and the strategies we are taking to address them.

INSIDE

- Defining good practice
- The work of CEE
- Strategies for environmental youth work
- A youth unit and the future

ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH WORK briefing



COUNCIL FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Environmental youth work combines youth work skills and values with an environmental education agenda.

The key theme of environmental education is **sustainable development or education for sustainability**. Sustainable development, according to the Brundtland report *Our Common Future*, is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Education for sustainability is concerned with the knowledge, skills and values required to contribute to a sustainable future.

Environmental and development issues are becoming inextricably linked. Awareness is growing of the environmental impact of economic and political developments around the globe – especially between countries of the Northern and the Southern hemispheres.

The key youth work values are defined in the statement of purpose for the Youth Service. Here youth work is defined as being educative, participative, empowering and based on principles of equal opportunity.

For CEE, **environmental youth work** means bringing together the values and informal approach of youth work with the concerns of environmental education; our working definition is, 'a process which empowers young people to make changes that will result in a more sustainable way of life for all.'

What are the issues?

'The Environment' is literally everywhere, so there is no shortage of 'issues' and themes to explore and act on.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for workers is to make connections between the local environment and the global issues which are widely publicised. For young people in particular, the local environment is likely to be the priority. Taking action to improve the neighbourhood will be a more relevant starting point than the rather distant idea of saving the ozone layer. CEE's first major youth work project produced information and practical ideas to show what individual and collective action could achieve locally about global issues.

Looking at specific themes, the issues outlined in *EARTHworks* were: acid rain, agriculture, animal rights, the greenhouse effect, nature conservation, nuclear power, the ozone layer, pollution, recycling and waste.

Most recently, the themes of sustainable development, forest depletion, climate change and biodiversity – maintaining the variety of life – have become more central. These issues were the focus of international agreements at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992.

In relation to education, the concern over North-South inequality has created direct links between development issues, such as debt and fair trade, and environmental issues.

So what?

Young people are concerned about their world; youth workers and environmental organisations have some vital common interests and complementary strengths. There has never been a better time to build partnerships between youth workers and environmental organisations in order to involve more young people in talking, thinking and taking action about their environment.

GOOD PRACTICE

and how to recognise it

A GUIDE FOR FIELDWORKERS AND MANAGERS

Working alongside youth work staff, we have identified some key criteria for good practice. These criteria offer a framework to help workers and managers both plan and evaluate their work.

Two important notes

1. The criteria provide a framework for examining the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of work from an *environmental* point of view. They are intended to complement – not replace – organisations' existing criteria for good *youth work* practice. For example, the youth work aims of working in a participative way, addressing equal opportunities issues and having an educational base to the work are also essential aspects of good practice in *environmental youth work*.
2. Individual projects and activities are likely to focus on one or two, rather than all the criteria; the aim would be for longer term programmes – or a series of projects – to work towards addressing all of the criteria outlined here.

GOOD PRACTICE SHOULD...

Illustrate the links between the local and the global environment

Make connections between social issues and the environment

Enable individuals to convert their environmental concern into action

Develop skills in changing things at a political, social and practical level

Enhance understanding of the ecological processes that sustain life and our own relationship to the environment

THIS MEANS...

The large scale – and sometimes daunting – global issues are played out at local level. Local environmental issues will have their equivalents around the world. People can feel overwhelmed by the scale of environmental problems, however individuals and groups can make a difference locally. The action may be local, but it can have implications for people and environments in other parts of the world – making a difference globally.

Social education is the core of youth work – valuing young people's experience and exploring their understanding of the world they live in. Most social issues have an environmental component or have links with some aspect of the environment. The environment is where we are, not only up in the ozone layer or in the rainforests on the other side of the planet. Young people may be more concerned with lack of facilities than acid rain, but this is about *their environment*.

Youth work is about learning, which means it is also about change. In this way, the aims of environmental education and youth work are in parallel. The implication is that the learning should lead to action, perhaps to changes in lifestyle – for those directly involved and perhaps for others too.

Again, this environmental goal is in line with the goals of youth work. It reflects what is, perhaps, youth work's key theme – participation – young people taking on power and responsibility, developing their skills as active citizens: planning, deciding, co-operating etc.

Understanding a situation can be a motivation for action. The networks that sustain life on the planet are intricate and inter-linked. Our environment provides us with resources, absorbs wastes and supports life. Our relationship with the environment is complicated, too, by economic factors. Youth workers may find allies within environmental organisations, to bring their knowledge to young people. It is important not to be scared off by fears of lack of knowledge – often we (and especially young people) know more than we think about ecological processes and issues.

FOR EXAMPLE...

- Looking at the food and drink we buy can raise issues of debt and fair trade.
- Checking on – and then doing something about – the energy we use (and waste) will have an impact on the greenhouse effect and on our fuel bills.
- Conservation work can show the importance of the preservation of wildlife habitats and landscapes world-wide.

- Surveying use of facilities by different groups could raise a number of issues of access, such as race, gender and disability.
- Play – what facilities should there be locally?... and what facilities exist?
- A project exploring how the environment of the youth club could change to make it more suitable for good youth work is one way of getting young people to look critically at their own environment.

- Recycling projects are a practical way of doing something personally and for the wider community.
- Community forest and tree planting projects offer opportunities for individual and collective action.
- Energy-saving measures can be taken in the home and the youth group.

- A group may visit local councillors to find out about local authority facilities or policies.
- Agenda 21 provides an opportunity to be directly involved in local decision-making.
- Young people will need to work as a group if they are organising an event.

- Finding out about the causes and effects of deforestation – the impact of the timber trade on indigenous people; the conversion of woodland into grazing land in order to increase the availability of meat.
- Finding out about food chains and the interdependence of living creatures and plants while planting a forest.
- Discovering the best growing conditions for the cuttings being grown to plant in community flower-beds.

STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH WORKERS

A youth worker's guide to the maze of environmental education approaches

There are many different starting places and different routes for environmental youth work. But, a wide range of choice can be a double-edged sword – for someone new to the work, it can be confusing. To try to simplify matters, we have begun to identify the distinctive features of different ways of working.

Based on examples of work around the country, this overview includes brief examples of what

each means in practice. We have – so far – identified three basic approaches, each with different emphases. In reality, no category is ever completely separate from another; however, these descriptions may help you look at 'where you're coming from' and decide how you could find your way through the maze of options for taking on environmental youth work.

POLITICAL EDUCATION APPROACH

— focus on power and decision-making.....

SOCIAL JUSTICE APPROACH

Key values: Environmental problems are caused by inequality and the oppression of people. Any solution must tackle these issues first.

- The starting point can be personal experience, for example the way many built environments fail to take into account the needs of women with small children, or the way air pollution particularly affects children and young people.
- Another focus uses development education to understand the connections between the mechanisms of the money market and environmental issues.

CAMPAIGNING

Key values: Change can be achieved by influencing others and publicising issues, both locally and at a national or international level.

- Petitions, political lobbying, demonstrations, public meetings, posters etc. to change local decisions and attitudes. A number of youth groups have conducted local campaigns, for example to get recycling facilities.
- Direct action; animal rights groups have attracted a lot of media attention for their activities, which often involve young people.

COMMUNITY ACTION

Key values: People should be involved in a democratic way in redesigning their own living, playing and working spaces.

- Consulting people about problems in the area is now quite a common feature of housing management on inner city estates.
- Community architecture and some urban studies approaches take this further by involving groups in practical investigations of different factors that shape an area and in making decisions about change.
- Some conservation organisations take a similar approach, involving people in decisions about the open spaces and planted areas of their neighbourhood.
- New opportunities to participate in local decision making are likely to start appearing as local authorities begin to implement Local Agenda 21, a commitment arising from the 1992 Earth Summit.

ANTI-ELITIST APPROACH

Key values: The environmental movement itself is elitist. Excluded groups should define for themselves what environmental issues are and how to tackle them.

- The Black Environment Network (BEN) provides grants to ethnic minority groups to make countryside visits and get involved in nature conservation.
- The Women's Environmental Network (WEN) produces publications and campaigns around issues that tend particularly to affect women, for example sanitary protection, clothing and jewellery.
- Other initiatives include mass trespasses for access to the countryside and campaigns for access for people with disabilities.

USING THE OUTDOORS

— environmental perspectives on outdoor activity.....

CONSERVATION

Key values: Involvement in management of habitats and studying local wildlife builds ecological understanding and a respect for places and other living things.

- Wildlife groups offer a range of activities including mammal and bird spotting, ecological surveys, pond dipping etc.
- Conservation groups offer opportunities for environmental action such as footpath maintenance, rubbish clearance, fencing and scrub clearance which help manage habitats for wildlife or reduce the impact of visitors on an area.
- People can take part in environmental activities anywhere – there is an increasing emphasis on wildlife in towns and improvements to local neighbourhoods. Work by organisations such as Groundwork and Rural Action demonstrates this.

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

— exploring issues and action for young people and youth groups.....

AUDITING AND POLICY MAKING

Key values: Young people can express and explore their views and gain social and personal education through investigation and participation in decision making within the youth club.

- Investigation by young people of the environmental aspects of club premises, activities and practices through quizzes, surveys, opinion polls etc.
- Developing environmental policies, charters and action plans for changing things within the club, eg energy saving, transport, recycling and re-use, and environmentally friendly purchasing for cleaning, coffee bar stock etc.

OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Key values: The traditional benefits of adventure education – personal development and challenge – can be enhanced through environmental awareness.

- Using less sensitive areas for climbing, canoeing etc. Reducing the environmental impact of activities while gaining direct experience of the natural world.
- Working with local people, particularly local environmentalists, when taking young people away on residential.
- Using experiences in the outdoors to understand the local environment.

SENSITISATION TO NATURE

Key values: You can only learn to appreciate and understand the ecological processes that support life by getting closer to them.

- Earth Education emphasises the magic of nature; its activities are widely used and adapted throughout the environmental movement. Activities include tree-hugging, blindfolded sensory trails and simulations of ecological processes.
- New Earth Education materials aimed at 13-16s have more emphasis on personal lifestyle and choice.

GREEN CONSUMERISM

Key values: Individuals can do something about global environmental problems through making choices about how they live.

- There are a number of guides to 'buying green', also bodies that can advise on ethical investment and banking.
- Some Development Education Centres have developed workshops around green consumerism, including issues such as health, holidays and fair trading.
- Youth of Bath (YOB) did a survey and produced a guide to ethical shopping in Bath.

CREATIVE/EXPRESSIVE APPROACH

Key values: Using creative media, young people can explore their own attitudes to issues and communicate them to others.

- Ideas range from writing and performing environmental songs to ideas such as recycled fashion.
- Drama, poster making, t-shirt printing and photography are all tried and tested media for expressing concerns, usually with some kind of introductory activity or discussion to explore environmental issues.

THE TRAINING ROUTE

Training will have an increasingly important role in helping to build the awareness and skills that youth workers will need to create more good practice. The environment officially became part of the youth work agenda when the statement of purpose for the youth service was developed through a series of Ministerial Conferences supported by the Department for Education. The OFSTED report, *The youth work curriculum*, specifically includes environmental work as one of its main elements.

Voluntary organisations at national and local levels are including the environment within their youth

work priorities. The same is happening within local authorities; here the issue is given added impetus by the commitment to young people's involvement in Local Agenda 21 developments. (See back page for more about Local Agenda 21s).

The challenge for trainers and training managers is to identify how they can support face-to-face workers in ensuring that their work has an environmental dimension. The work of the Youth Unit at CEE has begun to answer these questions. The future work programme will include working alongside trainers and training managers to develop these ideas even further.

TRAINING THEMES

The priority for training programmes on environmental youth work is to change attitudes, rather than simply to impart knowledge. Our experience so far has highlighted a number of attitudes that training needs to encourage:-

- **You don't need to be an environmentalist to do environmental youth work.**

The environment seems to be both a 'specialist' and 'scientific' issue. This may be the biggest barrier to progress for environmental youth work. Workers may see environmental work as something that requires specialist knowledge before they can start to do anything. As with many other 'specialist' areas - health education being a good example - experience has shown that it is a worker's enthusiasm and commitment that is essential, rather than detailed knowledge. Finding out information with young people is a valuable part of the youth work process.

While most youth workers may not become experts on the many environmental issues that could be explored, they do have a responsibility to help build links with individuals and organisations who can pass on relevant information. Stimulating this change of attitude is vital for trainers in the field.

- **The environment is global and local**

The well publicised issues are the 'big issues'. The scale of problems like rainforest destruction can lead to young people - and youth workers - feeling

powerless to do anything. But the environment is right here and right now, it is not just 'out there'. There are things that young people and youth workers can do about their own environment - their youth club, their neighbourhood, their village or city - that can improve the quality of life for themselves and others in a direct way. These actions can also impact upon the global issues. Training needs to make clear to workers that they can look locally and globally for things to do.

- **The environment touches young people's daily lives**

Sometimes youth workers worry about how to introduce 'the environment' into their group. The fact is that the environment doesn't need any introduction - it's here all the time! Everything we do has an environmental impact - both locally and globally. Looking at any aspect of our lives will throw up environmental talking points - whether it's looking at clothes, music, food, leisure or work. Environmental youth work is a matter of taking a perspective on what is already there, rather than adding a new issue.

Trainers should also encourage workers wanting to introduce environmental youth work to start from the interests of the young people in their group. This will help to demonstrate that environmental issues are directly relevant to young people's own priorities and experiences.

DEVELOPING TRAINING STRATEGIES

Building on its previous work, CEE is able to offer help and advice on setting up environmental youth work courses as well as integrating environmental aspects into existing courses.

We have expertise in all aspects of the youth service, which means we are able to help with the training of full-time, part-time and volunteer staff. This has included providing advice and training for local authority youth workers in various areas, including Lincolnshire and Manchester, and for a range of voluntary organisations such as PHAB (Physically Handicapped Able Bodied), the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Youth Clubs UK.

CEE is also keen to advise on and promote any initiative that directly involves young people.

CEE's National Environmental Youth Work Training Programme has tried a number of different formats including:

- **Individual activities relating environment to other social issues**
eg – A session on how an environment can be changed to avoid excluding groups – relating the environment to equality of opportunity.

Can be used either to raise awareness of the relevance of environmental issues or in a situation where there already is a policy commitment to the environment and the aim is to integrate it into the training programme.

- **Introductory sessions for part-time workers**
eg – A morning, afternoon or evening session to establish a common understanding of what environmental youth work is and the scope of 'the environment' as an issue.

Appropriate for, say, an area or unit team. Good for helping establish a positive climate for further work, especially with part-time workers.

- **A day course on practical project work**
eg – A day course covering techniques and background knowledge for project-based work.

Particularly useful with full-time staff in stimulating practical action. A way of initiating new practice where there already is some interest.

- **A week-end course developing a theme**
eg – A theme of 'respect' can cover respect for self, respect for others and respect for the environment. A week-end can include awareness of environmental issues, practical ideas for getting started and some local opportunities.

Appropriate for an area team that has already expressed an interest.

- **A 'mixed menu' conference**
eg – A conference offering a choice of workshop themes.

Effective in stimulating interest and action at a local level. It is essential that youth and environmental organisations share resources, contacts and ideas – a good model for environmental youth work.

BUILDING ALLIANCES

Where things are happening at ground level, the idea of building alliances is proving very powerful. In practice, this involves sharing ideas and expertise.

Youth workers can make use of the advice and information of environmental organisations, which can often offer access to resources previously unavailable to them. In return, environmental organisations are able to promote their cause with young people – and they gain access to youth workers and youth work skills.

This is something CEE is also reflecting at national level. A major part of CEE's role involves building partnerships and alliances – linking people and agencies together into networks – and linking those networks, where possible, with funders.

ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH WORK CONSORTIUM

CEE is part of a consortium of youth work and environmental organisations, committed to environmental youth work. The group currently comprises Wildlife Watch, the Youth Hostels Association, RSPB, the Woodcraft Folk, the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council, and Youth Clubs UK.

Linking complimentary parts of their work programmes enables members to share information, learn from each other and avoid duplication.

The Youth Unit is involved in several projects with consortium members including:

- **The Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council (CYEC):** international exchanges are increasingly using the environment as their focus. CYEC's plans stress the involvement of young people in planning as well as participating in events;
- **Youth Clubs UK,** the largest non-uniform youth organisation in the UK, which has included more and more environmental work in its programme over the last three years. It is likely that the emphasis in Youth Clubs UK's future work will be on networks run by and for young people themselves.

WORKING WITH OTHER PARTNERS

The Youth Unit is also building partnerships with other organisations including:

- working with the **Groundwork Foundation** (which represents a network of more than 30 Groundwork Trusts), to bring a stronger youth work dimension to its work with young people – building the values of good youth work practice into existing conservation practice;
- advising **local authorities** and **national voluntary organisations** on the creation of environmental youth work policies and the development of specific training initiatives.

REGIONAL NETWORKS

An essential part of building alliances involves the development of networks. CEE supports the development of regional networks for practitioners in environmental and youth organisations, both voluntary and statutory, creating opportunities for people to support each other and exchange ideas, as well as sharing information and contacts.

Supporting the networks, CEE's newsletter, **EARTHlines**, provides a central focus for people around the UK, highlighting examples of good practice, new publications, profiles of organisations in the field, funding, upcoming events and other news of interest.

For details, see 'How can we help?' on the back page.

GETTING YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE AGENDA

The right of young people to have a say in the environmental decisions that affect them is enshrined in the outcomes of the Rio Earth Summit of 1992. Governments committed themselves to consult and involve young people at all levels of decision-making and planning. This means that there is now an opportunity – even an obligation – for young people and youth workers to be active on environmental issues locally.

180 Heads of State met in Rio de Janeiro in July 1992 to discuss the problems facing Planet Earth and her 5 billion inhabitants. One outcome of the Earth Summit was an action plan for the 21st century, called **Agenda 21**. The action plan was adopted by all the governments present, including the United Kingdom government.

Young people have a place on that agenda for action. It's made clear in Chapter 25 of Agenda 21:

"Governments..... should take measures to establish procedures allowing for consultation and possible participation of youth in decision-making processes with regard to the environment, involving youth at the local, national and regional levels."

Agenda 21 itself calls for the participation of today's young people in decision-making on environment and development. It recognises that their involvement is critical in moving towards more sustainable ways of life. Young people are seen not only as having an investment in the future, but as having a stake right now!

Although Agenda 21 is an international agreement, two thirds of its proposals can only be achieved by local action. The way to achieve this is through Local Agenda 21s.

In the UK, Local Agenda 21s are the responsibility of local authorities, who are setting up their own action plans. These Local Agenda 21s will aim to:

- promote consultation on sustainable development with the whole community – including young people;

- make sure that different sectors in the community are talking to each other as part of the process;
- identify actions that people can take locally that will make a difference

Many local authorities are appointing Local Agenda 21 Co-ordinators and setting up round tables and consultations which bring together representatives of all sectors within the

community. Some are exploring how young people can be involved meaningfully in the process. Most of them need help in achieving this.

The Youth Service, with its links with both local councils and young people, is ideally situated to facilitate youth participation as required by Local Agenda 21 initiatives. Those working with young people will need to be

proactive in forging links with Local Agenda 21 co-ordinators. Youth workers need to be offering specific ideas, projects and programmes as well as generally promoting the involvement of young people.

There is a requirement within Agenda 21 that young people should be involved in project identification, design, implementation and follow up – so there is official backing for any attempt to persuade your local authority to listen and provide support for young people's views and action.

Now is a good time to ensure that the UK Government honours its pledge to empower young people to participate fully in the environment and development decision-making process at local level.

How can we help?

The CEE Youth Unit is able to offer advice and help on:

- environmental events for young people
- contacts with other workers and organisations in the field
- development of policies and strategies
- evaluation of environmental youth work
- resource development
- formation of training strategies and programmes
- obtaining appropriate environmental information

You can contact us at:

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Also available from CEE:

EARTHworks – a collection of practical ideas for environmental youth workers.

EARTHlines – bimonthly environmental youth work newsletter.

Other briefings in this series:

Environmental Youth Work – Good Practice: Criteria and Case Studies

Environmental Youth Work – Training of Youth and Community Workers

Price: £2 each.

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